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General Assembly
Emergency Special Session

Official Records

34th meeting
Friday, 16 January 2009, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 5 (*continued*)

Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Draft resolution (A/ES-10/L.21)

The President: Brothers and sisters, we have many speakers on the list. I am going to beg everyone to please not feel obliged to read out their entire statement, but to give only a summary, as the texts of their statements will be circulated in full. That is so that we may take action today. As I said yesterday, it is the least we can do for our brothers and sisters who are living in a veritable inferno in Gaza. We want to send them a message today — tomorrow is too far away. One person said maybe on Monday, but that would be a failure of the Assembly. We have to act quickly. The consensus among those who have already spoken is evident.

As members know, there is an official draft resolution that has been circulating since yesterday, and we want to take action on it today — certainly no later than 6 p.m., and if before, then all the better. I plead with all members not to feel obliged to read out their entire prepared statement, as the full texts will be officially circulated, but to give a synopsis so that we can move ahead and take action on the draft resolution.

Mr. Tuah (Brunei Darussalam): On behalf of the Brunei Darussalam delegation, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting of great importance to respond to the current crisis in and around the Gaza Strip.

Brunei Darussalam is deeply concerned with the deteriorating situation in and around Gaza. The deaths of more than a thousand innocent Palestinians, the injuries suffered by thousands more and the massive destruction of their homes and infrastructure highlight the gravity of the situation.

We add our voice to those condemning the continued excessive use of force by Israel and call on all sides to exercise the utmost restraint. The escalation of violence in Gaza has further deprived the Palestinian people, who have already endured suffering due to the blockades. These recent developments have undermined the gains that the international community has made in order to bring about a just, peaceful and permanent solution to the conflict.

The international community is called upon once again to act decisively and show leadership at this crucial juncture. Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) has sent a clear message for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, called for the sustained reopening of the crossing points, urged the provision of humanitarian assistance without restriction to those in need and welcomed all regional and international efforts under way to achieve a comprehensive peace. This important resolution must be observed.

Let us also not lose sight of the root cause of this conflict, which is the suffering of Palestinian people and their efforts to regain their lost homeland. In believing that the two-State solution is the only viable

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option in this conflict, Brunei Darussalam hopes that all parties will be able to work towards this goal. In this regard, we recognize the untiring commitment and readiness of Member States that have come forward to help seek a negotiated solution.

Brunei Darussalam reiterates its long-standing commitment to the rule of international law under the auspices of the United Nations and adds its voice to all those calling for the utmost restraint by both sides.

Once again, we thank you, Sir, for convening this special session, thus providing an opportunity for the wider membership of the United Nations to exchange views on the grave situation in Gaza to further help regional and international efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region.

Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica): The situation that has caused us to assemble here today in this resumed tenth emergency special session is indeed beyond a doubt regrettable. It has been exactly one week since the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1860 (2009), which called for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire. To date, what we have seen is an escalation in violence and the continued reckless killing of Palestinian civilians and the maiming of others, including defenceless women and children, and the destruction of property and infrastructure, including the United Nations compound.

The Government of Jamaica is extremely concerned at the escalation of the conflict in Gaza. We obviously recognize Israel's right to protect its citizens. We are, however, horrified at the disproportionate and excessive use of force and the blatant disregard for the safety of innocent civilians on the part of the Israeli Government.

We are no less concerned about the indiscriminate firing of rockets over many weeks into Israeli territory by Palestinian militants. This cycle of violence and retaliation impedes efforts and thwarts initiatives aimed at brokering lasting peace in the region.

Jamaica is appalled at the horrific tragedy unfolding on the ground, which, according to the chief of emergency medical services in Gaza, has now killed over 1,000 Palestinians — more than half of them civilians — and wounded 4,500, many of whom are women and children.

We believe it timely to reiterate our support for Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and urge both sides to fully and expeditiously implement the ceasefire — a ceasefire that is durable and fully respected and that will facilitate the unimpeded provision and distribution of aid in order to alleviate the suffering and worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza. Jamaica is naturally encouraged by and welcomes the ongoing Egyptian efforts aimed at achieving a ceasefire and the mediation efforts of Egypt and the League of Arab States to realize intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

History has demonstrated that there can be no military solution to this conflict. A people's rights and legitimate aspirations cannot be suppressed indefinitely. Jamaica continues its call for all parties to pursue diplomatic efforts in order to ensure the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this regard, we call for the resumption of negotiations aimed at arriving at a permanent solution that would guarantee Israel's security and the right of Palestinians to statehood, in keeping with Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call on Israel to withdraw to its pre-1967 borders.

Finally, we have taken careful note, Mr. President, of your indication regarding a draft resolution, which you have prepared, for action on it today. My delegation would lend its full efforts to ensure that we can in fact adopt that resolution.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The current situation in Gaza is dramatic. Only an immediate halt to hostilities by all parties to the conflict can put an end to this tragedy in which so many people have died and so many people have been wounded, and which has caused so much suffering.

Switzerland reiterates its appeal for an immediate cessation of both the rocket attacks against Israel and the Israeli military operation. It welcomes the resolution adopted by the Security Council and calls on the parties to act on it without delay. We also welcome the international efforts to achieve a ceasefire, and we strongly encourage all parties to the conflict to respond to them favourably. An immediate ceasefire and the provision of humanitarian aid are, however, only the first essential steps. They must be accompanied and followed up by a political process and a dialogue between all the parties to the conflict.

In this ongoing armed conflict, we would like to emphasize the following three aspects that we consider

to be especially important and that warrant immediate attention.

First, it is once again civilians, including children, who are bearing the brunt of the fighting. Access to medical care for the wounded and humanitarian access to the civilian population are essential to saving lives, evacuating and caring for the wounded and restoring a minimum level of human dignity. The disruption of water supplies requires immediate work to prevent this already very serious situation from deteriorating even further.

The current circumstances are making the work of humanitarian agencies very difficult. We urge all parties to the conflict to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law in order to permit swift and unimpeded humanitarian access to the wounded and the needy and to ensure the protection of humanitarian workers. In that context, Switzerland was particularly shocked by the recent news of the bombing of United Nations facilities in Gaza.

Secondly, thousands of people are currently displaced in the Gaza Strip. Those persons, whose numbers are growing, must be protected and supported. They have the right to seek safety elsewhere in the territory or to leave.

Thirdly, all parties to the conflict must comply strictly with their obligations under international law. That includes the obligation to meticulously respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in order to ensure the greatest possible protection of civilians and their property, as well as the protection of medical personnel, hospitals and other health facilities. For Switzerland, it is of the utmost importance that those three humanitarian considerations be appropriately reflected in a General Assembly draft resolution.

There are many allegations that violations of international law have been committed during this conflict. As it had the opportunity to do in the Human Rights Council on Monday, Switzerland reiterates its call for an impartial inquiry into all allegations of violations committed by all parties during the hostilities.

Switzerland remains convinced that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be resolved by military means. Only negotiations aimed at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, living side by side with an internationally recognized State of Israel within secure borders, can bring about a lasting solution to this persistent conflict.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At this important debate, the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to make an announcement that we consider important. In response to the policy of genocide adopted by the Government of Israel against the Palestinian people, and given the crimes against humanity committed by its political and military elite in the Gaza Strip, its repeated use of State terrorism and the refusal of its Government to abide by Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in keeping with the principles of peace and solidarity that guide its foreign policy, has decided to break diplomatic relations with the State of Israel.

The human tragedy in the Gaza Strip is Dantean. Thousands of dead and wounded are the toll of Israel's bloody occupation of the Gaza Strip. In that caravan of death, it is women and children who are most vulnerable.

The occupying Power, Israel, persistently violates article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, imposing collective punishments on the population of the occupied Palestinian territory, using indiscriminate and excessive force against civilians, destroying electricity and water distribution networks, bombing public buildings and restricting freedom of movement. Those actions against the lives, families, health, nutrition and psychological well-being of Palestinians are flagrant examples of collective punishment. The Israeli aggression has caused the largest forced displacement of Palestinians since 1967. International organizations and doctors working in the Gaza Strip have detected uranium residues on victims and have reported that Israel is using white phosphorous bombs in densely populated areas, which is undoubtedly a violation of international humanitarian law.

The actions of the State of Israel seek to subjugate the Palestinian people by exterminating them. That is genocide. Crimes against humanity have been committed and cannot go unpunished. The International Criminal Court or a special tribunal have the responsibility to act at this moment in history.

The Security Council, after a disturbing period of paralysis, adopted resolution 1860 (2009), in which it

calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, and for the unimpeded distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza. However, the Israeli political and military elite pursues its acts of genocide in Gaza and confidently declares that it will not comply with resolution 1860 (2009).

The Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, has stated that he rejects the resolution because he considers it impossible to implement and claims that the operations will continue. Indeed, they have continued and have now also struck major United Nations facilities in Gaza, causing numerous and tragic deaths. He says, "Israel has never agreed to external forces determining its right to defend its citizens". In other words, he brazenly and clearly refuses, in broad daylight, to comply with the Security Council resolution. A Deputy Prime Minister of Israel says openly, "Nothing will happen if this resolution remains dead letter. Our interest is all that matters." What brazen unwillingness to comply with international law and with the Council resolution!

The Government of Israel claims it is exercising its legitimate right to self-defence when in fact it is carrying out an indiscriminate and disproportionate attack against the Palestinian people before the eyes of the world. The Israeli Government's arguments are untenable. In a 2004 ruling on the construction of the Israeli wall in Palestine, the International Court of Justice rejected the argument of legitimate self-defence invoked by Israel. The fact is that it is not possible to speak of legitimate self-defence when the violence is carried out by Israel against a people and a territory that are subject to its cruel occupation.

Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people did not begin on 27 December 2008 because Israel has never stopped being an occupying Power. The actions we are witnessing are neither isolated nor random. Rather, they are part of a plan designed at the time the Israeli State came into being to expel and exterminate the Palestinian citizens from their land with the open and perverse support of imperial Powers.

The Israeli Government's punitive measures are part of a deliberate strategy to make it impossible for the Palestinian people to effectively exercise its right of self-determination. In this context, it undertakes military actions to effect the tragic ethnic cleansing of this Arab people.

The Israeli warmongers decided not to recognize the legitimate right of an independent Palestinian State to exist, as stipulated in resolution 181 (II). What they seek, in any case, is to decimate the population so that it accepts any decision that is the product of terror and of military, technological and numerical force.

The ongoing military siege by air, sea and land imposed on the Palestinian people, including the closure of the six land border crossings that connect Gaza to Egypt, the West Bank and Israel, are reminiscent of the disgraceful practice of apartheid.

The preferred targets of genocide by the political and military elite of Israel in the Gaza Strip are civilian — mosques and universities, schools and homes, hospitals and medical warehouses, factories and the media. Israel obstructs the entry of humanitarian aid, and even bombs schools and United Nations convoys of humanitarian aid, as we have seen in recent days. It is time to reiterate that there are universally recognized human rights the validity of which cannot be suspended, even in the event of armed conflict.

Faced with this criminal policy, with these violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and with the flouting of hundreds of resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council concerning Palestine, and particularly resolution 1860 (2009), what will this emergency special session of the General Assembly do? How can the United Nations be party to the massacre of the Palestinian people and not take effective decisions to stop it? How much more suffering will be needed to make world leaders aware of what is happening?

This session of the General Assembly is an historic opportunity to adopt a resolution that embodies humanity's overwhelming desire for peace. It is necessary to say that in the light of Israel's disregard for resolution 1860 (2009). Venezuela welcomes the convening of this emergency special session of the General Assembly as a genuine expression of the 192 countries that make up the United Nations. We have been fortunate that the request of the Non-Aligned Movement to the President of the General Assembly, Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, to reconvene this session was received and acted upon. As representatives know and as Father d'Escoto Brockmann has explained, Venezuela, Malaysia and Indonesia had requested the President of the General

Assembly to reconvene this emergency special session. This meeting is therefore a golden opportunity for this forum to express the expectations and the hopes of the peoples of the world.

In 2004, the International Court of Justice stated that, while the Security Council has the primary responsibility for maintaining peace, it does not act alone; rather, that responsibility is shared by the General Assembly.

Our delegation has supported the proposal for the President of the General Assembly to submit for the Assembly's consideration a draft resolution on the item before us today. We wish to acknowledge the President's courage in reconvening this session, bearing in mind the desperate attempts made by some countries, including Israel, to sabotage that effort.

We also wish to acknowledge the importance of the draft resolution submitted to us by the President of the General Assembly. We believe it forms the foundation for a broad agreement. We place great value in Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann's efforts. An exceptional Nicaraguan, he is a man committed to the causes of the peoples of the world, striving to achieve solid consensus.

Allow me to speak here with perfect clarity. We believe that it would be advisable to bear in mind the suggestions that have been made by various delegations, including that of Venezuela, that the draft resolution be enriched and strengthened. We therefore suggest that the following points be taken into account.

We must demand that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately and unconditionally comply with resolution 1860 (2009). We must demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the Gaza Strip. Should that not happen, the delivery of humanitarian aid would be impossible because the criminal Israeli army holds complete control of the land, sea and air access to all points of the Gaza Strip, a topographically limited area controlled in the most savage and bloodthirsty manner by an army that is among the most powerful in the world.

We must call on all States Members of the United Nations and the international community to take part in the rebuilding of Gaza. To that end, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela welcomes initiatives such as those of His Royal Highness the Emir of Qatar, who has announced a sizeable financial contribution, and of the Governments of Brunei Darussalam, Brazil and Argentina, which are also willing to send humanitarian aid.

We must demand that Israel, the occupying Power, lift the economic and military blockade on the occupied territory of Gaza and that Israel immediately reopen the border crossings with the Gaza Strip to allow access to humanitarian aid and the free movement of people. With regard to humanitarian aid, we must urge UNICEF and all related institutions to implement an aid programme for Palestinian children and teenagers affected by the trauma of war.

Lastly, we must support Human Rights Council resolution S-9/1 of 12 January 2009 on the grave violations of human rights after the occupation of Palestine, including the recent occupation of the Gaza region. The Human Rights Council was created by United Nations statute. It could be called a favourite child of this institution, for it focuses specifically on matters in this area. The least the General Assembly could do is to welcome and commend that resolution. Furthermore, fundamental elements for a resolution of this emergency special session of the General Assembly can be found in the important and essential statement issued by the Non-Aligned Movement on 13 January. We also wish to underscore the importance of the proposal from the President of the General Assembly.

At any rate, the Assembly resolution should be adopted today, for this is no time for delays. It is a time to take humanitarian and political action in the Assembly. We commend all the good offices that may be brought to bear during this crucial moment in history by our President, Father Miguel d'Escoto, who has the full trust of this body and, in particular, the complete trust of the people and Government led by Hugo Chávez Frías.

Given the shortcomings of the Security Council, it is necessary to push for a true reform of the United Nations so that the General Assembly — and for this reason, this event should be welcomed — as the expression of the manifold interests of the international community, would have the power to guide global affairs concerning international peace and security.

In the context of the United Nations reform process, it is necessary for the General Assembly, as a universal and representative body of the international

community, to have the decision-making power in global matters. The current structure of the United Nations has collapsed, and it does not reflect the changes that history is demanding. It represents the agreements that were knit together after the Second World War. We are witnessing the splitting of the unipolar model and the emergence of a multipolar world, in which the equality of nations is the predominant feature.

We must demand that Israel, the occupying Power, meet its obligations within the framework of international humanitarian law, particularly international human rights law. Israel's political and military elite repeatedly violate the resolutions of this body. It has always placed itself on the margin of international law, used State terrorism and systematically resorted to war as a policy of expansion and a tool to persecute the Palestinian people. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will therefore urge the international community to denounce the crimes against humanity committed by Israel before the International Criminal Court or a special tribunal.

The solidarity of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and its President, Hugo Chávez Frías, with the Palestinian people goes beyond political discourse. In that sense, I wish to inform the Assembly that humanitarian aid has already been sent to the Palestinian people, and the Egyptian Government has offered its good offices to see that it reaches those for whom it is intended, the people of Gaza. The first lot of this humanitarian aid arrived in Egypt just a few hours ago and includes 13 tons of medical supplies to help the injured Palestinian civilians. The second lot will be sent in the next few days and will include 80 tons of non-perishable food. Also, planes from the Venezuelan air force will be crossing the seas, covering thousands of kilometres to bring help from the Venezuelan people to the people of Gaza. Furthermore, Venezuela plans to send medical personnel and civil servants who are highly specialized in rescue and aid operations.

Allow me to conclude my remarks with a brief thought. We have before us the moral responsibility to give the world a lesson in humanity and to recover the hope that has nearly been lost, that a more just and honourable world is possible. Insane violence can lead to the dehumanization of societies and turn them animalistic. That is happening today. Only the clamour of the peoples can break the vicious cycle of war. Only the peoples' condemnation of intolerance and irrationality can stem this thirst for crazy violence. The General Assembly must have its say.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its deep appreciation for your call, Sir, to hold this meeting to consider the unjust Israeli aggression against Gaza.

I begin by aligning my delegation with the statements of the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the representative of Uganda on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Arab Group. I will read out a brief summary of my statement, the full text of which has been circulated.

Facts concerning the causes of the current situation in the Gaza Strip have been distorted and falsified. Those distortions caused many well-intentioned people to become confused, and many also became convinced that the Palestinians of Gaza were the direct cause of the situation, while disregarding the fact that the roots of the problem are in the occupation, which has continued for more than four decades, accompanied by various Israeli practices that include killings, arrests, displacements, expropriation of territory, destruction of homes, establishment of settlements and methodical aggression by Israeli authorities and settlers. All such practices are intended to compel Palestinians to leave Palestine, in continuation of what the Israelis have been doing since 1948.

The occupation and those practices are the root causes of what is occurring now. However, let us also briefly consider its immediate cause. In mid-2007, the Israeli occupation authorities, as is widely known, imposed a blockade on the Gaza Strip, isolating it and depriving it of food. In June 2008, a so-called truce was declared between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The truce was supposed to last for six months, during which time each party would refrain from any act of violence against the other. The Israelis promised that they would open the border crossings to allow the free movement of goods into and out of Gaza, thus providing for a return to the status quo that existed prior to 2005.

The Palestinians abided strictly by the truce. Unfortunately, the Israelis did not honour their

commitments, breaking the truce more than 190 times. They partially opened certain border crossings and restricted the amount of goods allowed to move into and out of Gaza to less than 20 per cent of the amount permitted prior to June 2007, causing an unprecedented deterioration in the population's economic and living conditions. Yet the Palestinian resistance continued to comply with the truce.

On 4 November 2008, without any provocation from the Palestinian side, the Israelis carried out a military incursion into Gaza, killing six Palestinians. So was it not natural that the Palestinians should try to defend themselves with whatever means were available to them? Then, on 5 November, the Israelis imposed a total blockade on the Gaza Strip, depriving it of all of life's necessities, including food, medicine, goods and fuel. That led to the current situation, which is characterized in particular by a lack of many essential medicines and a lack of potable water for more than 70 per cent of the population, sewage flowing through the streets, a complete shutdown of factories and rampant poverty and hunger. Can there be a more cruel and horrible aggression than to deprive a people of what it needs to survive? Is it not the right of Palestinians to defend themselves with whatever means available to them?

The events that began on 27 December 2008 then followed, when the Israelis began to commit indiscriminate acts of killing and destruction. In front of the eyes of the entire world, they killed innocent civilians, including women, children, doctors, nurses, humanitarian personnel and journalists, wiping out entire families and injuring thousands; they prevented medical teams from reaching victims before they died from loss of blood; they destroyed homes, houses of worship and educational institutions; they bombed hospitals and even United Nations facilities; and they fired on ambulances and humanitarian assistance convoys — all of which was witnessed by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations. They attacked residential areas with phosphorus bombs, which burn everything they touch.

Despite the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for an immediate ceasefire, Israel has announced, through its Prime Minister and other officials, that it rejects the resolution. Indeed, in a clear challenge to the international community, Israel has escalated its criminal aggression.

The following, in the words of an eyewitness, is what is now occurring in Gaza:

> "What Israel says it is doing in Gaza is waging a war against Hamas. The facts on the ground, however, are entirely different. This is a war between an army equipped with the most complex weapons and unarmed civilians who lack even shelters to protect themselves. It is a war against Gaza."

Israel's attack against the civilians in Gaza is definitely worse than any Nazi act and is unprecedented in history in terms of its horror and ugliness. Today, therefore, we call on the General Assembly to adopt a draft resolution that calls for an immediate and durable ceasefire, an immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces, an end to the blockade and the opening of all border crossings, that clearly denounces Israel's aggression and continued violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, and that reaffirms Human Rights Council resolution S-9/1, which calls for the establishment of a commission of inquiry to investigate the crimes and violations committed. We regard that as a minimum. However, for the sake of consensus, we support the draft resolution that you submitted, Mr. President, first and foremost as an expression of our appreciation for you and your noble position.

Mr. Al-Allaf (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Permit me at the outset to express my gratitude and appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this resumption of the tenth emergency special session to discuss the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and its catastrophic effects on the civilian population. Your well-known positions have shown your clear commitment to the noble purposes and principles of the United Nations. Since the first day of your tenure, you have sought to do justice and to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the General Assembly.

Jordan wishes to align itself with the statements made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of Arab States, by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the representative of Uganda on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

This resumption of the tenth emergency special session to discuss the situation in Gaza is a clear and full expression of the international community's rejection of the Israeli aggression against an unarmed

and besieged population. Jordan has denounced that aggression, which has claimed thousands of innocent civilian victims. Jordan calls once again on the international community to fulfil its political, legal and moral obligation to compel Israel to comply with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) by ceasing forthwith all its military actions and its policy of collective punishment against Palestinian civilians, lifting the blockade, opening all border crossings and alleviating the catastrophic suffering caused by its military operations, which are in clear violation of international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all relevant international instruments for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, particularly children and women.

Resolution 1860 (2009) clearly expressed the international consensus calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, which should be fully respected. It also expressed the need for a total withdrawal by Israeli forces from Gaza, the provision of humanitarian assistance, efforts to relieve the humanitarian and economic situation in the Gaza Strip and renewed efforts by the parties and the international community to achieve a peace based on a two-State solution, as envisioned in resolution 1850 (2008). This international consensus has international legitimacy now and a mandatory legal and moral political character that should be respected by all, especially Israel.

The leadership and people of Jordan are totally committed to supporting the Palestinian people in order to help put an end to their humanitarian suffering and achieve their basic rights, including the creation of an independent Palestinian State on national Palestinian soil. Since the start of this crisis, His Majesty King Abdullah has been carrying out intensive contacts with a number of his brotherly Arab leaders and regional and international political leaders in order to guarantee the immediate cessation of the aggression and the full compliance of all parties with resolution 1860 (2009). Jordan expresses its full support for the tireless and continued efforts of the sisterly Arab Republic of Egypt to achieve an immediate ceasefire and an end to the suffering of our Palestinian brothers and the protection of their rights.

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza has reached unprecedented levels that offend the conscience of humankind. Killing and terrorizing acts have become daily occurrences. This is all happening while the Israeli military machine continues its killings and its aggression, without paying any heed to the calls of the United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has described the depth and gravity of the tragedy in Gaza. The Israeli aggression, excessive and disproportionate use of military power and unjustified blockade of the Gaza Strip have destroyed all hopes for normal life there. Children, journalists, physicians — none have been safe from the Israeli aggression, which has destroyed facilities, public services, schools, universities, hospitals, houses of worship and even the buildings of United Nations agencies and United Nations depots for humanitarian and medical supplies.

The aggression must be followed by a serious and effective international effort to deal with the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip, to rebuild it and to restore normal life to the people of Gaza. Jordan is completely committed to these efforts. His Majesty the King has ordered that Jordanian hospitals be opened for the service of our Palestinian brothers and that all possible resources be made available to them through medical assistance and the preparation of a military field hospital to be sent to Gaza to deal with patients and the injured. Jordan also expressed its willingness to provide all facilities to the United Nations institutions that are working there to deal with the consequences of the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the aggression and to launch an effective partnership with these institutions to guarantee the provision of all forms of support and assistance needed by our Palestinian brothers.

Jordan is also ready to help provide any international assistance via its territory at any time through the Hashemite charity organization, which works incessantly to help deliver assistance and units of blood to our brothers in Gaza. The assistance ordered by His Majesty to be sent to Gaza now totals 14 caravans, loaded with 2,311 tons of food aid and medical supplies. In addition, an air bridge has been provided to move 80,000 ready-to-eat meals to El-Arish airport, as a first stop on their way to the Gaza Strip, and to have them distributed through the World Food Programme.

Jordan also continues to provide delivery of assistance to Gaza from Arab, Islamic and Western States and continues its contacts with its partners in the European Union to find ways to use Jordan's

operational and logistical capabilities to provide assistance to Gaza through the Hashemite charity organizations, the national security centre and the national emergency management organization.

Peace and stability in the Middle East will not be achieved through military operations. It can be achieved only through dialogue and serious negotiations, which will give the legitimate Palestinian Authority the means to realize the aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish an independent, viable, contiguous State, with Jerusalem as its capital. A return to negotiations is the only way to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the relevant international terms of reference, including United Nations resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Israel's use of military might not only threaten the stability of the region, it also undermines efforts carried out by international parties to realize peace in the Middle East, as expressed in Security Council resolution 1850 (2008). It threatens the entire peace process seeking to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of a two-State formula, which is a basic condition for achieving peace and stability in the region.

Once again, our delegation supports your efforts, Sir, in this tenth emergency special session, and we support the adoption of a General Assembly resolution to reinforce Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Our delegation also expresses its readiness to carry out all efforts to facilitate the adoption of this resolution as soon as possible.

Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Palihakkara (Sri Lanka): My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statement made by the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people and outlining the collective views of the Movement on the grave humanitarian, security and political situation arising from the continued attacks on Gaza and its people. As a country that has suffered much at the hands of unbridled violence unleashed by terrorists, Sri Lanka knows only too well the human and material cost of such violence, which can indeed impede political solutions.

At the outset of the latest military attacks, the Government of Sri Lanka, on 5 January 2009, expressed its deep anguish and concern over the escalating violence in Gaza, which has led to much bloodshed. This escalation has not only resulted in further loss of civilian life and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, it has also increased tensions in the region, with all the many consequences such a situation portends. The Government of Sri Lanka had called upon all parties to end military action and violence immediately and ensure a climate conducive to finding a way forward towards the two-State solution, a solution that is agreed to by all concerned as the only lasting solution. The Government has also reiterated its belief that such a cessation of violence by all sides would ease the untold human suffering now endured by the Palestinians and the trauma and anxiety of the people in the region.

As noted by the overwhelming majority of the Member States, especially the non-aligned countries, it is a matter of deep concern and regret that these calls for the cessation of violence have not been heeded and that humanitarian agencies, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, have been the subject of attacks, resulting in the deaths of humanitarian personnel and their inability to continue delivering assistance to the Palestinian people.

Given the vital necessity of ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, all parties should facilitate their work, which is so essential to meeting the needs of the affected people, a fact that Sri Lanka is fully aware of through our own experience of providing for and supplying civilians affected by conflict due to terrorist violence.

We join others in calling upon all parties concerned to abide by the calls for the cessation of violence, especially those contained in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), and to create conditions that will promote an effective process of negotiations. We hope that recent efforts by the friendly countries of the region and the Secretary-General's initiative to use his good offices to bring about an immediate end to the suffering and the commencement of a process towards a lasting solution will bear fruit.

We believe that the unity of the Palestinian people is of the utmost importance in achieving a

lasting solution to the question of Palestine. It is our hope that all segments of the Palestinian polity will make efforts to resolve their differences by peaceful means, unite in pursuance of the aspirations of their people and support President Abbas and his Government. Sri Lanka wishes to reiterate its support for the Palestinian people and their leadership in their efforts to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement.

The Annapolis conference, held with the participation of major stakeholders, gave us hope for progress in negotiations between Israel and Palestine with the aim of achieving agreement based on the two-State solution by the end of 2008. Regrettably, this achievement has not materialized and the Palestinian people continue to face more violence and more suffering. These new hardships add to those caused by the extensive restrictions and other measures of collective punishments that have frustrated the Palestinian people as well as the political process.

Sri Lanka desires to see amity and unity among Palestinians and Israelis on the basis of the two States of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and harmony within secure borders. We consider it timely that practical measures have been taken to bring about an early resolution of the problems faced by the Palestinian people. At this critical juncture in the Palestinians' quest for their legitimate human and national rights, the Government and people of Sri Lanka would like to reaffirm our continued support for and solidarity with them.

Finally, my delegation also hopes that the Assembly can take urgent decisions in this regard without delay, based on the proposals before us.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In recent days, Russia has frequently expressed its principled position with regard to the events in the Gaza Strip.

I should like once again to affirm our extreme concern over the deaths and suffering of civilians in Gaza. The bloodshed must stop immediately, allowing us to avert a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, evacuate the wounded and help the civilian population simply to survive. The entire international community demands an immediate and lasting ceasefire respected by all sides, including an end to the rocket attacks on Israel, that should lead to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. That demand is echoed in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which should be implemented in full by Israel and Hamas.

It is important that we not be guided by our emotions but focus on achieving sustainable reconciliation and support the ongoing efforts of the international community, including the important work of the Quartet and the Secretary-General, who is now in the region, to that end. In that context, we highly commend the mediation role played by Egypt aimed at resolving the crisis in Gaza, and the resumed intra-Palestinian dialogue, which is an important precondition for resolving the problem of Gaza by diplomatic means.

I express the hope that the difficult consultations taking place in Cairo to settle the problems in Gaza will succeed in achieving a diplomatic and political resolution of the crisis that is mutually agreeable to all parties. We also hope that the Arab leaders will contribute to de-escalating the current dangerous phase in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

We believe that the main challenge ahead is not to point fingers but to find a way to end the violence. Wielding its traditional influence in the Middle East, Russia is pursuing its working contacts with all leading actors in order to achieve a ceasefire and the resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): We warmly thank the President of the General Assembly for responding so quickly to the request of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement to reconvene the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. Given the inertia in the Security Council, it is time for the most representative and democratic body of our Organization to call for an end to the slaughter and genocide that have been inflicted by the State of Israel on the defenceless civilian population of the Gaza Strip since 27 December, and to condemn that genocidal aggression in the strongest terms.

As we have noted on other occasions, the Nicaraguan people are deeply saddened by and concerned over the situation of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. That heroic people has fallen victim yet again to genocidal Israeli attacks by land, sea and air. Israel has been an oppressor and victimizer of the Palestinian people for 60 long years. The cruel, unjust and disproportionate Israeli attacks perpetuate the unsustainable situation in that enclave of people,

victimized by an ongoing economic blockade and by grave restrictions of their basic human rights.

The humanitarian tragedy has been deepened by Israel's tireless criminal aggression by means of sophisticated prohibited weaponry since 27 December. According to information received yesterday, some 1,013 people have been killed and more than 5,000 wounded, most of them women and children. These figures are approximately double those of 8 January, when the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009).

And yet, the Council has yet to take genuinely concrete and effective measures on the ground to put an end to the ongoing killing. The world has borne witness to the toll of dead and wounded, which has risen daily in the three weeks since the onset of this latest Israeli genocidal aggression, which would appear to have no end in sight.

Yesterday we saw Israeli forces attack a United Nations headquarters in Gaza, which was sheltering hundreds of individuals seeking the Organization's protection from the genocidal attacks to which they are being subjected by Israeli forces. We have also witnessed weapons prohibited by international humanitarian law being used against civilians — including white phosphorous, which has even been used against children. We have seen humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross not being allowed to reach victims.

It has become clear both from Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and from other previous Council resolutions on the Middle East that there is a disconnect between the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the actions it takes to implement them on the ground.

Israel, the occupying Power, has trampled upon the United Nations Charter. It has trampled upon international law, including international humanitarian law, and upon all of its moral and ethical responsibilities. The Security Council must meet its Charter obligation to maintain international peace and security and its ensuing obligation to put an end to all actions of aggression or breaches of the peace.

My delegation wonders how these disproportionate acts of Israel barbarity can be justified. How can the deaths, to date, of more than 1,000 civilians, including hundreds of women and children, be justified through an argument of alleged self-defence? How many more women and children will have to die in order for the massacre to end? When will the closures to the border crossings in Gaza be lifted and when will unimpeded access be permitted for humanitarian aid? The fact that the Security Council is not acting or meeting the responsibilities incumbent upon it does not free Member States of their Charter obligations; nor does it free the United Nations of its responsibility under the Charter to maintain international peace and security.

Many international organizations and bodies have issued statements condemning the Israeli aggression and calling for a ceasefire and an end to the killing of Palestinians. Among them are the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Human Rights Council, UNICEF, UNESCO and others. There have also been statements from the overwhelming majority of States that make up the international community. Also, around the world, there have been increased public demonstrations rejecting the Israeli massacre and invasion of Gaza. We cannot sit idly by as we daily witness dozens of dead and wounded innocent civilians. All international stakeholders should work to bring about an immediate ceasefire and to put an end to the military attacks and bombings that are bringing suffering to the Gaza Strip.

The General Assembly is the most democratic and representative body of the United Nations, in which all the Governments and peoples of the world are represented. It has the duty and the obligation to act on the situation in Gaza and to speak up and bring its influence to bear in demanding an immediate end to the Israeli attack and the immediate withdrawal of the occupying forces.

We call for the adoption today of draft resolution A/ES-10/L.21. My country would have preferred a stronger text calling for an immediate ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, condemning in the strongest terms this genocidal aggression and Israel's practices of extermination in Gaza and demanding an end of hostilities, the opening of all border crossings, humanitarian access, the establishment of a monitoring mechanism, guaranteed protection for civilians and respect for international law and international humanitarian law. Such a text would also help strengthen the rule of law by supporting a criminal prosecution mechanism to ensure that those responsible for war crimes, crimes against

peace and crimes against humanity, including genocide, are brought to trial. It would seek to strengthen the peace process in general and to ensure that the Palestinian people can exercise its inalienable right to self-determination through the establishment of a Palestinian State based on the pre-June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

However, we are willing to support the present draft resolution for the sake of a consensus that will bring an immediate end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. My Government supports all initiatives aimed at putting an end to the genocide as soon as possible. We are willing immediately to cooperate in the bodies of the United Nations and in the Non-Aligned Movement.

Silence in the face of these barbaric acts is complicity and that cannot be accepted by the peoples of the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Africa and even in the United States of America and Israel, the people have taken to the streets and are demanding that the genocide of the Palestinian people be brought to an end. They are demanding freedom for Palestine. Nicaragua reiterates its full and complete solidarity with the fraternal Palestinian people in its fight for freedom and for a State of their own.

We note with great satisfaction the initiative announced yesterday by the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar. His Highness the Emir has decided to establish a reconstruction fund for Gaza and Qatar has announced that it will contribute $250 million. Likewise, we welcome the Emir's appeal to Arab States to offer to organize a maritime transport operation to bring humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip as quickly as possible.

I should like to quote President Daniel Ortega Saavedra of the Republic of Nicaragua on this matter.

> "With the authority of the Nicaraguan people, in the name of peace and in the name of God, we call upon the international community once and for all to take the steps necessary to ensure that Israeli troops withdraw from Palestinian territory."

Yesterday, Nicaragua took the Chair of the Central American Integration System (SICA) at its meeting in Managua, at which SICA heads of State or Government issued the following resolution with regard to the situation in the Gaza Strip, dated 15 January 2009 at Managua.

> "The Heads of State and Government of the Central American Integration System (SICA), bearing in mind the current situation in the Gaza Strip,
>
> "Regret that a final ceasefire between the parties has not been achieved, which has led to a great loss of human life and significant material damage and has created greater political instability in the region.
>
> "They therefore agree:
>
> "To call for the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli army in strict compliance with the agreements reached within the framework of the United Nations Security Council, aimed at bringing about a lasting ceasefire that would make possible the restoration of peace, access to the wounded and reconstruction of the areas devastated by the conflict, and
>
> "To call upon the United Nations Security Council to intensify its efforts to restore stability in the area, bearing in mind that it is the organ bearing primary responsibility within the United Nations system for the maintenance of international peace and security."

Mr. Hreggvidsson (Iceland): Iceland firmly supports calls by the Secretary-General for both sides to stop the fighting immediately. But the Gaza conflict cannot be addressed as a stand-alone issue. While we must acknowledge the urgency of stopping the immediate crisis, we must also frame our calls in the broader context of the imperatives for sustainable peace: first and foremost, the urgent recommencement of the peace process; intra-Palestinian reconciliation; the ending of the blockade on Gaza; and the ending of the closure regime in the West Bank.

The peace process must recommence with the active involvement of the United Nations and the international community. A new approach is needed to find a way out of the impasse. The Arab Peace Initiative is promising, but such an international process needs the full commitment of all parties involved. Iceland renews its call for the better inclusion of women in the peace process, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The firing of rockets from Gaza to terrorize Israeli civilians must stop. Iceland has condemned these rocket attacks. Hamas bears a heavy responsibility for drawing civilians into the conflict zone.

That said, one side's breach of international law does not exempt another from the need to abide by it. Iceland has already condemned the targeting of civilian homes, schools, hospitals and mosques in Gaza. These acts are in violation of international humanitarian law. Growing pockets of the population are trapped in their homes and aid organizations are unable to access them, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The International Committee of the Red Cross states that

> "wounded people have been abandoned and left to suffer alone, unable to reach hospitals and inaccessible to ambulances and medical workers. Some wounded have even died because ambulances did not receive the required clearances to reach them in time".

We call on Israel to permanently remove restrictions on medical teams and humanitarian aid.

Iceland stresses the importance of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the region, especially for Gaza's inhabitants, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees. We welcome the Security Council's call to Member States for additional contributions to the Agency in resolution 1860 (2009). We strongly condemn Israel's attack yesterday on UNRWA headquarters in Gaza, where 700 civilians had sought shelter from the shelling and vital supplies were stored. We, the United Nations Member States, must demand a full explanation for the number of attacks the United Nations has suffered in Gaza in the past three weeks. These attacks are unacceptable.

We must break out of this vicious cycle of violence. The international community must play the role of good physician and do its best to remedy the cause of the conflict. At the same time, Israel and Palestinians must refrain from actions that inflame the symptoms.

This emergency session of the General Assembly should lend its full support to the call for a ceasefire in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and its immediate implementation.

Mr. Al-Najem (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to thank President D'Escoto Brockmann for all his sustained efforts and his clear insistence, since the first days of the conflict, on an immediate and complete ceasefire following Israel's aggression against the Gaza Strip. He has convened this resumption of the tenth emergency special session in the context of international demands to examine the illegal Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, which are in clear violation of international instruments and international humanitarian law.

We support the statements made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Uganda on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and Morocco on behalf of the Arab Group.

The Israeli occupier has escalated its aggression on Gaza, which is now in its twenty-first day. A number of areas have been bombed, including hospitals, schools, an office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and offices of the international press and media. There have also been a series of air raids in which Israeli forces have used phosphorus bombs.

This conflict began on 27 December 2008 and has so far claimed 1,100 martyrs, including 400 children and about 80 women, and over 5,000 wounded. What we are seeing in Gaza is a genocide and war crimes against a defenceless people; it invalidates all Israeli claims to legitimate self-defence. It also undermines the claim that Israel is the only democratic country in the region. Can democracy take pleasure in the spilling of blood and in the suffering of women and children?

Kuwait expresses its deep concern at the ongoing aggression, which is in clear defiance of the international community's demands and of regional and international diplomatic efforts to secure an immediate ceasefire. We repeat that the military aggression against civilians, which we reject, is a serious violation of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. It only fuels the cycle of violence and threatens international peace and security and the already fragile peace process. Israel must implement resolution 1860 (2009) and other relevant resolutions, and ensure unconditional

respect for international law and for the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The Palestinian people, who are being killed on an ongoing basis by Israel, the occupying Power, have suffered for many years under blockade and collective punishment. Every minute sees new innocent victims. Israel has targeted UNRWA schools and bombed the main UNRWA office in Gaza. Kuwait calls upon Israel to take every possible measure to avoid a repetition of such attacks against civilians and humanitarian targets. We repeat the need for an impartial investigation into this aggression, while ensuring the security of UNRWA officials and allowing them to fulfil their responsibilities towards Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

The humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Gaza, is extremely difficult. We call upon all donors to give additional humanitarian assistance and to support the humanitarian organizations working there. We would like to pay tribute to UNRWA, which is working in very dangerous conditions.

The aggression not only has immediate effects, but also increases feelings of hatred and resentment. It is therefore not just a threat to international peace and security, but also the cause of an extremely dangerous humanitarian situation, because security cannot be ensured through tyrannical force, massacres and the targeting of civilians.

Lasting peace and security can result only from a credible political process that creates hope and leads to a better future. Arab countries and other peace-loving countries have been unanimous in demonstrating their solidarity with the suffering Palestinian people in the face of the unjust aggression against them, especially in Gaza. They are struggling for their inalienable right to self-determination and to create an independent State on their national soil, within secure borders and with Jerusalem as its capital.

Because of our belief in the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a ceasefire, we will host an Arab economic summit on 19 and 20 January. The Israeli aggression against Gaza will be the main item on its agenda. Arab Ministers for Foreign Affairs are currently meeting to study developments in the situation in Gaza.

We appeal to the conscience of the international community — if that conscience still exists — to call for an immediate halt to the Israeli war machine that is killing innocent people in Gaza, and we support draft resolution A/ES-10/L.21, submitted by the President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Ba-Omar (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its sincere thanks to the President for his sincere and tireless efforts, which my Government highly appreciates, to convene this emergency special session on Israeli violations in the occupied Palestinian territory, in response to requests by numerous States and regional and political groups. My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representatives of Morocco on behalf of the Arab Group, Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Uganda on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The General Assembly is meeting today to discuss an extremely important and serious matter: Israeli aggression against the occupied Palestinian territory, notably the massacres that have been committed against civilians in Gaza. Those horrific massacres by the occupying Israeli forces targeting the Palestinian people can be described as war crimes and as a form of genocide against a people under siege. If the international community represented by the Security Council is unable to stop those actions, that will be tantamount to a setback and will undermine the credibility of the international order.

While we strongly condemn the aggression and the massacres committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, we call upon the international community to take immediate action to stop the massacres, force Israel to accept a ceasefire, withdraw its forces from Gaza and allow aid and humanitarian assistance to reach the Gaza Strip, in implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

It is time for the international community to speak with one voice and to warn Israel of the consequences of its aggression against the Palestinian people, which violates international norms and principles and is a blatant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The language of war and military escalation is futile: the only way to ensure Israel's security lies not in the killing of Palestinian civilians, but through

negotiations with the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace that will provide security and stability for all parties.

Through the President of the General Assembly we call on the Security Council to shoulder its full responsibility as the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. What is happening in Palestine today requires immediate and urgent action by the Security Council to stop the aggression and impose a ceasefire. Failure by the Security Council to achieve that goal would undermine its credibility and role. Security is not an exclusive right for Israel to enjoy while the Palestinians do not.

We believe that the Security Council should act unanimously. Certain States should not be allowed to exercise the right of veto, and that right should not be abused when involving a humanitarian situation such as the one we are witnessing in Gaza and the genocide being perpetrated against the Palestinian people.

We believe that the Security Council should not adopt resolutions that cannot be implemented. We call upon the Council to establish a clear, practical and transparent mechanism to ensure implementation of its resolutions. If Israel does not implement the Security Council's resolutions, the Council should adopt punitive measures against the Israeli entity. Israelis believe that they are above the law and can do anything without accountability, and that they can disregard international norms and principles. That is a situation that must be reviewed. What continues to happen in Gaza requires immediate mobilization at all levels by the United Nations — not only by the Security Council but also by the International Criminal Court, in order to punish the perpetrators.

Finally, we wish to see immediate and responsible action by the Organization, especially by the Security Council. We endorse and support the draft resolution that is before the Assembly today in document A/ES-10/L.21.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): The United States is deeply concerned about the situation in Gaza and southern Israel and the resulting loss of civilian life and human suffering. This is a very serious matter, as we all recognize. But this is a situation as a whole that is best dealt with through efforts on the ground, not through tendentious statements, polemics or unrealistic proposals that do nothing to influence the situation in a positive way.

The Assembly must be careful not to complicate efforts to seek a solution or undermine ongoing diplomatic activity to halt the violence in Gaza. This is especially so when the Security Council is dealing with the matter as provided for in the United Nations Charter. This special session should not be allowed to devolve into a platform for vituperative criticism just as every effort is being made to find a mechanism to bring the conflict to a halt. The Assembly must exercise great caution that its deliberations are not seized upon by Hamas or other terrorist groups as encouragement or justification for their unlawful actions or to further inflame tensions and spread violence and instability in the region.

The United Nations has already spoken through Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), and the Secretary-General is in the region right now working to find a solution to the situation and to ensure the resolution's implementation. That is where everyone's efforts should be focused: on the real work of diplomacy being done in the region.

The situation before the current events in Gaza was clearly not sustainable. The people of Gaza watched as insecurity and lawlessness increased and as their living conditions grew more and more dire because of Hamas's actions. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis lived under daily threat of rocket attack, a circumstance no country would be willing to tolerate.

Our goal must be the stabilization and normalization of life for the people of Gaza. It is imperative that any ceasefire be durable and sustainable and that it ensure the safety and security of Israelis and Palestinians alike. Security Council resolution 1850 (2008) describes the principles to chart a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike, noting that lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations. That is the end to which all our efforts should be directed and with which Hamas's current actions and policies are incompatible.

As a procedural matter, I noticed that yesterday the President of the General Assembly circulated his draft resolution (A/ES-10/L.21). I would note that such presidential drafts are normally presented as consensus

documents on behalf of the entire membership. I would appreciate any information you might be able to provide to us, Sir, as to what plans the presidency has in mind for scheduling consultations to achieve that consensus.

The Acting President: I assure the representative of the United States that his query will be relayed to the President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Mansour (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The gravity of the ferocious Israeli aggression against the brotherly Palestinian people has reached an extremely dangerous level. Israel's brutal attacks continue to target civilians, residential areas, hospitals and schools, using the most deadly weapons, including internationally banned weapons. This has killed or injured thousands of people, many of them women and children, and has caused massive damage to infrastructure. This all has taken place in front of the international community, which has been unable to achieve an effective ceasefire or put an end to the shedding of Palestinian blood, despite the intense efforts being made.

At the beginning of the aggression, His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali issued an urgent appeal to the international community to put an end to these dangerous developments, and to the aggression, to provide international protection for the brotherly Palestinian people and to end the blockade against them. His Excellency also strongly condemned the Israeli military escalation in the Gaza Strip. Our country has expressed its deep concern over the humanitarian, living and health conditions there, which have become a human catastrophe due to the continued shelling of houses, residential areas and civilian facilities and the continued blockades and closures, which have prevented access for international humanitarian and medical assistance. A school run by a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was targeted today, as were UNRWA warehouses for food and assistance in Gaza, medical relief teams and employees of international and humanitarian agencies and journalists. All of this is a grave violation of international humanitarian law and the Additional Protocol of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which deals with the protection of victims, especially women and children, during international military conflicts.

In the light of the difficult and cruel conditions in which the people of Gaza are living, His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali has undertaken a number of immediate and urgent actions since the beginning of the aggression, which he did as an act of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Those actions are based on our conviction, as a people and as a country, that we must stand beside the Palestinian people in their current crisis, support them in these difficult conditions and help relieve their suffering.

Today, we renew our appeal to the international community and to all parties and agencies to intensify their efforts to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The gravity of the catastrophic humanitarian situation caused by the Israeli military aggression places the human conscience today before a historical responsibility. This requires firm, immediate and collective action to put an end to the aggression, to provide medical and humanitarian assistance and to guarantee that aid reaches the victims without delay.

In the light of Israel's persistent aggressive actions and its obstinate disregard for international resolutions, as well as all international and humanitarian instruments, international protection for the brotherly Palestinian people is now a greater necessity than ever before; it would guarantee an end to human losses and the targeting of innocent civilians. This demand enjoys consensus among all international parties and specialized forums, notably especially the Human Rights Council, which, in its resolution S-9/1, adopted in Geneva on 12 January, reaffirmed the need to provide immediate international protection to the people of Palestine in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Tunisia has continuously sought to achieve a just, comprehensive, lasting and peaceful solution based on international legitimacy and international initiatives. Therefore, Tunisia calls on influential parties to speedily facilitate an end to the grave deterioration of this situation, undertaking the necessary steps and efforts to achieve peace and stability in the region. Tunisia reaffirms that any crisis can be resolved only through dialogue and negotiation, and in the absence of violence and aggression that victimize innocent civilians who have long lived under occupation and blockade, deprived of the most basic rights guaranteed by all relevant international instruments.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the President for resuming this emergency special session. This meeting is very timely and necessary, and we hope it will have a positive impact in easing the current Israeli and Palestinian tensions.

The Israeli military action against Gaza is into its twenty-first day. It has left more than 1,100 residents of Gaza dead and more than 5,000 people wounded, including many innocent civilians, women and children. The continuous escalation of the conflict has rendered tens of thousands of people homeless in Gaza and has resulted in massive destruction of infrastructure and a dire shortage of food, water, fuel and medical supplies. The situation is critical. The conflict continues as we speak. Each passing hour brings more civilian casualties and loss of property. We are deeply concerned about the non-stop escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and are deeply worried about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza.

We condemn all violence against civilians. We are shocked and appalled at Israeli attacks against a United Nations school, relief convoys and United Nations buildings. We demand that Israel ensure the safety of United Nations personnel and other relief workers. We urge Israel to stop immediately its military actions and withdraw its troops, open all crossings in Gaza and ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza.

The armed Palestinian party concerned should stop launching rockets. No action against international humanitarian law and human rights law will be tolerated.

With painstaking efforts on all sides, the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009) on 8 January. It sent a very clear message. In particular, it called for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire and urged Israel to fully withdraw its forces from Gaza and ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza. However, it is regrettable that more than one week has passed and resolution 1860 (2009) remains unimplemented. The imperative now is to push all parties to fully implement Council resolution 1860 (2009) and immediately reach a ceasefire in order to prevent further civilian casualties. We support the efforts undertaken by Egypt and the Secretary-General in this regard.

The international community should give priority attention to the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza and take effective measures to ease it. We support a United Nations assessment of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We appeal to the international community to intensify its relief efforts and support the reconstruction of Gaza. The Chinese Government has already provided emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian Authority in the amount of $1 million, and we will continue to provide assistance to the best of our ability, in the light of developments in the situation.

We have always opposed the use of force in solving disputes. The excessive use of force by Israel is not acceptable. The Israeli-Palestinian question is a very complex one. There can be no military solution to the conflict, and military means can be of no help to either side. We maintain that Israel and Palestine should implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map, and on that basis solve their disputes through political negotiations so that the two States, Palestine and Israel, can live together in peace. China is ready to work with the rest of the international community to push the parties concerned back onto the track of political negotiations, so as to achieve a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli question.

China supports a General Assembly resolution on the current situation. We note that the President of the Assembly has formulated a draft resolution. We hope that all parties concerned can reach consensus on the draft resolution so as to ensure that the General Assembly can adopt it.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since 27 December, we have borne witness to the tragic events and violence that have unfolded in the Middle East, specifically in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. This situation has led to many deaths, destruction and anxiety, in particular among the civilian population. Mexico condemns in the strongest terms yesterday's bombardment by Israel of a hospital, a building that housed media offices and the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

In response to the crisis, the United Nations has been mobilized through determined action by the Security Council, the organ that bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international

peace and security. By adopting resolution 1860 (2009) on 8 January, the Security Council fully assumed its responsibilities and laid the groundwork for a cessation of hostilities and a return to the road of peace. At the same time, various diplomatic initiatives are being undertaken with an eye to putting an end to the violence and to allow for humanitarian access in Gaza.

For that reason, we were surprised by the convening of this emergency special session of the General Assembly. But having been convened, these meetings are a new opportunity for all countries to state their official positions regarding this serious situation. The position of Mexico, as a member of the Security Council, is well known.

Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) sets forth the conditions for the attainment of a durable ceasefire, allowing for unimpeded access of humanitarian access through the creation of corridors for the entry of such assistance, and for renewed dialogue as the only possible solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Compliance by all interested parties, backed by diplomatic efforts in the region, is essential for the attainment of those goals, including putting an end to the death and destruction in the Gaza Strip as well as to Hamas's rocket fire at Israel, which has also brought damage to civilian populations.

On 13 January, the Secretary-General, with the unanimous backing of the Security Council, began an important trip to the region, in order to enter into direct contact with the primary heads of State or Government directly involved in the diplomatic efforts under way designed to promote the full implementation of Council resolution 1860 (2009) and to restore calm and peace to the region.

For all of these reasons, Mexico believes that the General Assembly should support the actions undertaken by the Security Council within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009) as well as those undertaken by the Secretary-General, and in that context should call upon both Israel and Hamas to put an immediate end to their hostilities.

Mexico hopes that, from these meetings, we can generate a resolution that is worthy of consensus among all Member States.

Ms. Espinosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to thank the President of the General Assembly for having responded favourably to the request from my country and the Non-Aligned Movement for the resumption of this emergency special session of the General Assembly, given the critical situation in the Middle East and the non-compliance by Israel with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). More than 60 years ago, my country participated in the creation of the United Nations with the purpose of maintaining international peace and security, preventing and removing threats to or breaches of peace, and bringing about lasting solutions to conflicts by peaceful means, in conformity with international law. This idea is now reflected in article 416 of the new constitution of Ecuador, which advocates seeking peaceful solutions to international disputes and conflicts and firmly rejecting the threat or use of force as a mechanism for resolving conflicts.

Unfortunately, despite being a Member of this Organization and a signatory to the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, Israel continues to choose military action over dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflict. It flagrantly violates the fundamental principles of international public law and international humanitarian law. The international community, represented by this Organization and its organs, cannot for even one day fail to lift its voice in protest and condemnation of Israel for its military offensive undertaken 21 days ago in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, which has led to the death of more than 1,000 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians, including 280 children and to more than 4,000 wounded. The aggressor's arrogance includes attacks on hospitals and cemeteries, not to mention United Nations facilities and property such as the school where more than 40 children lost their lives, humanitarian aid convoys, and finally, yesterday, the very headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), thereby isolating itself from the entire international community and the principles that this Organization represents.

The Government and the people of Ecuador would like once again to express their solidarity with all of the innocent victims of the disproportionate Israeli aggression and to reiterate their deep concern regarding the humanitarian crisis in the area due to the abominable closure of border crossings to and from the Gaza Strip, which blocks the unhindered access of humanitarian assistance, including food and medicine, and the normal delivery of fuel and electricity.

In that context, my country associates itself with the statement issued by the Non-Aligned Movement on 13 January 2009. The statement calls for immediate compliance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), in particular as regards an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, followed by a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. It also calls for the measures necessary to respond to the urgent humanitarian and economic needs of the Palestinian people, including the permanent opening of the border crossings into Gaza and the guarantee of unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and other basic supplies.

Ecuador also reiterates its full support for the resolution recently adopted by the Human Rights Council on the grave violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular those due to the recent Israeli aggression against the occupied Gaza Strip. In that resolution, parties are called upon to respect the provisions of international law and international human rights and humanitarian law. It also calls for international protection for the Palestinian people and urgent international action aimed at putting an end to the serious violations committed by Israel on Palestinian territory.

We could undertake a long debate on the legal interpretation of Articles 11 and 12 of the United Nations Charter, on the ability of the General Assembly to take decisions or make recommendations on situations that could threaten international peace and security. However, the world is hoping for much more from this Organization. My delegation therefore would like to call on all the organs of the United Nations system to comply with and enforce, within the framework of their respective jurisdictions, one of the most fundamental purposes for which they were created, that is, respect for human life.

My country therefore believes that the General Assembly should speak up today firmly and emphatically. Ecuador is thus willing to support action on a resolution leading to the effective implementation of a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, urgent attention to the humanitarian crisis suffered by the Palestinian people in this area as a result of the military offensive undertaken by Israel 20 days ago and an in-depth investigation, prosecution and punishment of all those responsible for crimes against humanity committed against the civilian population in Gaza.

Any comprehensive solution aimed at achieving lasting peace in the Middle East must be reached in the strictest respect for international law and through a permanent commitment to non-aggression and recognition that includes Israel's withdrawal from the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

For this reason, the General Assembly, the Security Council and all other relevant bodies of the United Nations system should bring to bear the pressure necessary to ensure compliance with each and every resolution and decision adopted over past decades on the question of Palestine, thus allowing for future and current development for the people involved.

An Assembly resolution adopted today in support of and calling for immediate implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) would be a key step in bringing pressure to bear on the international community, together with other international diplomatic efforts under way to put an urgent end to the terror and the humanitarian tragedy that has prevailed in Gaza for 21 days now.

World public opinion is hoping for a resounding response from this Organization. My country is willing to provide its cooperation and support in framing any initiative aimed at that objective.

Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Palestinian people are suffering under a criminal aggression. A new holocaust is taking place before the astonished gaze of the entire international community. Given these criminal acts, the Government of Bolivia demands full implementation and compliance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces from the sovereign State of Palestine, which continues to be subjected to foreign occupation in open disregard of resolution 181 (II) of 1947.

My Government urges Israel to put an end to the massacre of the Palestinian people and to ensure those measures necessary to address the pressing humanitarian and economic needs of the people in the Gaza Strip through an opening of the border crossings and the implementation of the terms and provisions of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), while

ensuring unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and supplies of food and medicine in that zone.

Bolivia laments the fact that today, far from having seen the implementation of the numerous Assembly and Security Council resolutions calling for the withdrawal of Israel from Palestine and other occupied territories, we instead see new forms of aggression. Instead of contributing to a just and lasting peace in the region, this perpetuates and increases the escalation of a permanent state of violence, undermining the efforts of the Palestinian people to be the masters of their own destiny.

Bolivia cannot sit idly by in the face of this situation. We cannot simply lament the fact that one United Nations Member State is not complying with Security Council resolutions and is continuing with the massacre and violations of human rights in Gaza. Therefore, on Wednesday, 14 January, Bolivia decided to cut off diplomatic relations with Israel in order to send the clear message that Israel cannot continue to ignore the resolutions adopted by the United Nations, an Organization of which it considers itself to be a Member. If we do nothing to ensure that these decisions are complied with, we will be accomplices to these deeds and to the breakdown of the United Nations.

What Israel is doing cannot go unpunished. The time has come to adopt more severe measures to put an end to this situation, which words cannot describe. Bolivia therefore believes that it is essential that the Security Council adopt a resolution that will send the Israeli authorities responsible for this massacre to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity and flagrant violations of the human rights of the Palestinian civilian population. Furthermore, measures should be taken so that no military action taken against United Nations offices in Gaza goes unpunished.

A solution in Palestine hinges on the unconditional return of all occupied territories. It should not be subject to pressure imposed by the aggressor State. The Government of Israel is directly responsible for the criminal acts against its own citizens perpetrated since the beginning of this invasion in December. The Palestinian people voted for their Government in free, transparent and democratic elections, thereby exercising their sovereign right to elect their representatives. Certain countries bear responsibility for having denied the legitimacy and validity of that process, an acknowledgement of which would today have simplified any type of dialogue and negotiation.

Bolivia welcomes the efforts undertaken by the international community, the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly, other world leaders and other bodies of the United Nations system. In this context, Bolivia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We cannot limit our action to speeches analysing and condemning the situation. The Security Council must adopt the measures necessary to force Israel to comply with the provisions of Council resolution 1860 (2009). The General Assembly is compelled by time and the situation itself to adopt a decision today. The President's draft resolution unequivocally reflects the clear desire of the international community to put an end to this aggression, which is a stain on the history of the twenty-first century. The future of a people depends on our taking action, as does the meaningful implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, fundamentally, the very real and effective — and not merely rhetorical — existence of the United Nations.

Mr. Barriga (Liechtenstein): We welcome this debate of the General Assembly, which is fully consistent with the mandate of this body under the Charter of the United Nations and the Assembly's practice under resolution 377 (V), "Uniting for Peace". At the same time, we regret that full clarity on the legal basis for this session was not provided at the beginning, as should have been the case.

Indeed, the dramatic situation in Gaza requires the full attention of this Assembly. The ongoing violence has led to a disproportionately high number of civilian casualties, many of them children, and has been characterized by disregard for the basic tenets of international humanitarian law. We express our deepest concern at the massive loss of civilian life, much of which seems due to a disrespect for the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and the principle of proportionality.

We are also deeply disturbed by the attacks against the United Nations school in Jabaliya and the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(UNRWA) and the targeting of humanitarian convoys, all in violation of international law and carried out at the expense of the civilian population.

We fully support Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), adopted by the Council more than a week ago, and join those who call for its full implementation. This legally binding decision must be implemented immediately and fully by the parties to the conflict. A durable ceasefire is both a first step and a precondition for a sustainable political solution. All military activities must therefore be stopped. There has to be an immediate end to rocket attacks by Hamas as well as to military action by Israel. It is clear that there can be no military solution to this conflict, and we therefore welcome the ongoing diplomatic efforts, including the mission of the Secretary-General, whose personal commitment we applaud.

The massive deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza is disturbing. Liechtenstein has been a regular donor to UNRWA over the past years, and our Government will decide on an additional contribution early next week, in the light of the urgency of the situation. However, this is not a problem of resources. It is a problem of access, as is sadly the case in other situations as well. We wish to recall that facilitating humanitarian operations is an obligation for all parties to this conflict under international humanitarian law. Immediate, unhindered and secure passage for the delivery of humanitarian aid must therefore be granted. After weeks of relentless conflict and massive violence in one of the most densely populated areas of the world, the humanitarian needs are urgent and numerous, ranging from the delivery of medical and other basic supplies to the evacuation of injured persons. These needs must be addressed immediately and with the support of the parties. We also hope that there will be no impunity for the massive violations of humanitarian law that seem to have been committed in the course of this conflict.

This session will have served a meaningful purpose if it results in a resolution that supports the implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and increases the political pressure in that respect. This is a time when the General Assembly must stand united and send the unequivocal signal that violence in Gaza is unacceptable and must end immediately. We therefore hope that a text resulting from this session will find the strongest possible numerical and political support in the Assembly.

Mr. Amil (Pakistan): We thank the President of the General Assembly for the timely and important statement he made yesterday. Pakistan supports the convening of this emergency special session of the General Assembly in view of the grave crisis and calamitous situation in Gaza. At a moment when the Security Council has been unable to shoulder its responsibility, the General Assembly has been obliged to step forward and play its rightful role under the Charter. This meeting also reaffirms the permanent obligation of the United Nations towards the resolution of the Palestine issue.

For the past 21 days, the international community has witnessed, in utter shock and disbelief, the unfolding of an unimaginable human tragedy and humanitarian catastrophe resulting from the ongoing campaign of terror and abominable crimes of Israel, the occupying Power, against the 1.5 million Palestinian people incarcerated in Gaza. Israel has blatantly defied worldwide calls for the immediate cessation of hostilities, the lifting of Gaza's blockade and the provision of unimpeded humanitarian assistance. With complete impunity, it has flagrantly violated international human rights and international humanitarian law, particularly its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

For its part, the Security Council has yet again failed to fulfil its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It failed to act quickly and resolutely to stop the aggression and to protect the innocent civilians of Gaza. It dragged its feet as the occupying Power escalated its killing spree in Gaza. Belatedly, reluctantly and under immense international pressure, and faced with the growing civilian body count, the Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009) on 8 January.

Though not an entirely satisfactory and fair decision, that resolution instilled hope for a ceasefire. The international community, including the visiting high-level Arab ministerial delegation, sincerely expected that the violence would stop from that point forward. Unfortunately, but consistent with its track record, the Council disappointed once again. It failed miserably. In fact, it did not even try to enforce compliance with its resolution, which was reduced to a farce. The massacre of Gaza meanwhile continues right under the Council's watch. Indeed, the Council remains seized of the situation — whatever that means.

Under the circumstances, the international community is confronted with a serious question: can it afford to wait another day while innocent civilians, women and children are killed, maimed, brutalized and terrorized by the Israeli war machine? The answer is no. Silence and inaction in such a situation are tantamount to complicity with the ongoing crimes and killings in Gaza.

Pakistan stands in complete solidarity with the Palestinian people, whose pain and suffering in this hour of trial we fully share and understand. The sentiments of sympathy and support of the people of Pakistan for the people of Gaza and the question of Palestine have been expressed through all means: peace demonstrations, statements by our President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, the adoption of a unanimous resolution by the National Assembly of Pakistan on 12 January, and other diplomatic efforts in the context of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement and the United Nations.

We join the rest of the international community in strongly condemning this latest Israeli aggression in Gaza, which is in fact a sequel of its decades-long policy of aggression against the Palestinian people and occupation of the Palestinian land. We support the unanimous demand to bring an immediate and complete end to this aggression and to address its causes and consequences in a just manner.

Just action can only result from a just and objective understanding of the situation and of the genesis of the problem. We wish to reiterate and highlight the following points in this context.

First, it needs to be recalled that the besieged populations of Gaza are mostly Palestinians who were originally dispossessed and driven from their own homes by the Israeli occupation.

Secondly, under decades of occupation, the Palestinian people have suffered the worst kinds of human rights violations and collective punishment, which were further aggravated by the callous blockade imposed by the occupying Power on Gaza.

Thirdly, rocket fire is only one aspect of the frustration expressed by a section of this oppressed and deprived population. We have called for an end to the firing of these rockets, which do not serve the Palestinian cause in any way. However, attempts to justify the overwhelming force and massively disproportionate response by Israel to these rockets are entirely misplaced and unjust. This is besides the fact that it was Israel that first violated the six-month temporary ceasefire long before it expired. In fact, Israel's refusal to lift the blockade has constituted a daily and constant violation of the truce.

Fourthly, no attempts or tactics by the occupying Power can be allowed to mask the root cause and origins of the conflict, which are occupation, human rights violations, collective punishment of the Palestinian people, and the denial of their right to self-determination.

The facts and figures being reported from Gaza are earth-shaking. More than 1,000 Palestinians have been martyred; Gaza is running out of burial space. Over 5,000 have been injured; there is no way of treating them. Hospitals are not only short of supplies, but have themselves become targets. Rescue and relief workers are being attacked. Nearly 40 per cent of the casualties are children and women. The international community is aghast at the heart-wrenching and appalling images of dead and injured children. Those alive are short of food and essential supplies; thousands are homeless, without shelter and surviving in the cold and dark. Displaced they are, but within the prison. There is nowhere to escape to.

The scale of destruction, especially targeted against civilians and civilian infrastructure, is colossal. Nothing and no one has been spared. Ironically, those who have absolved themselves of responsibility for preventing this destruction are talking of reconstruction. The Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits collective penalties against or collective punishment of the civilian population, as well as the three cardinal principles of international humanitarian law — proportionality, distinction and precaution — have been grossly violated in the ongoing conflict.

As if things were not bad enough already, there are now reports of white phosphorous being used. The use of this element, regardless of its purpose, adds another cruel layer to this tragedy. Furthermore, what can be more galling for the international community and this body than the fact that, on the very day the Secretary-General visited Israel, Israeli shells smashed through buildings belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the

Near East. We trust that the bitter irony is not lost on the international community.

The crisis in Gaza requires an urgent, collective and effective response from the international community. If the Security Council has not been allowed to act, this Assembly has to assume responsibility. In recommending action, the General Assembly may need to recognize the international condemnation of the situation in Gaza. It should distinguish between the aggressor and the aggrieved. It should be able to capitalize on the worldwide backing for an immediate and fully respected ceasefire and put its weight behind that call. It should compel Israel to immediately stop its aggression and completely lift the siege of Gaza. It can recommend the establishment of an appropriate mechanism to ensure the protection of the civilian population and the monitoring of a ceasefire in Gaza. It should demand unhindered and safe access and conditions for humanitarian work. It should also demand full respect for and the compliance of all parties with international human rights and humanitarian laws. It should make clear that there will be accountability for all violations of these obligations. It can pronounce its support for the ongoing efforts of the Secretary-General and regional and international partners to secure peace. More specifically, the General Assembly can endorse its support for the resolution adopted by the special session of the Human Rights Council, as well as for resolution 1860 (2009) adopted by the Security Council, and call for the implementation of those resolutions.

There is a need to act urgently. Failure to stop the Israeli aggression in Gaza will perpetuate the cycle of violence, foment desperation and anger and lead to the escalation of tensions in the region. Perhaps some may not have fully grasped the consequences; the biggest casualty could be the peace process. Therefore, at stake is the international community's shared objective of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the resolution of the Palestinian question. We believe the choice is clear. A solution lies not in the use of force, whose futility has been exposed time and again, but in dialogue and negotiations. Israel must demonstrate its sincerity and desire for peace; its actions prove otherwise.

We would like to conclude by reiterating Pakistan's steadfast and complete support for the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent and viable State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Ms. Gatehouse (Australia): Australia is deeply disturbed by the violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. Australia strongly supports the call in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire. We support the resolution's recognition of the need to address arms smuggling and to open border crossings. We also support the resolution's call for the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout the Gaza Strip of humanitarian assistance, and all efforts to improve the situation of civilians.

At this critical time, we believe that the focus for all of us present at this session needs to be on supporting those diplomatic efforts under way to give practical effect to resolution 1860 (2009). Serious and intensive negotiations are ongoing. We welcome the Egyptian-French ceasefire proposal and the important role played by Egypt in hosting talks, as well as the efforts of others, including Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

A solution must be found to end Hamas's rocket attacks against Israel, which have led to the current crisis and which we condemn. Hamas must also end arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip. This conflict has demonstrated once again the vital need for a two-State solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Australia remains strongly committed to that objective.

Australia is deeply concerned that, tragically, this conflict is profoundly affecting civilians. All parties should avoid actions which could result in unnecessary or increased suffering on the part of innocent civilians. Australia condemns any action by Hamas to deliberately endanger civilian lives.

We call on Israel to do all it can to ensure the safety of United Nations and humanitarian workers. It is also critical that Israel meet its obligations under international humanitarian law to the people of the Gaza Strip and ensure that they have access to basic goods, food, medical supplies and humanitarian assistance. We recognize and welcome Israel's establishment of pauses for the delivery of humanitarian aid, and we encourage Israel to do everything within its power to improve humanitarian access and restore basic services.

On 1 January 2009, Australia announced an immediate commitment of $5 million in additional assistance to the people of the Gaza Strip, which will provide emergency food and medical supplies, as well as cash assistance to conflict-affected families. This builds on the doubling of Australia's assistance to the Palestinian people in 2008 to $45 million. We stand ready to consider further assistance.

Mr. Lima (Cape Verde) (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this meeting of the General Assembly to address the conflict in Gaza and to allow all Member States to express their views, help shore up the fragile edifice of peace and defend the values of the United Nations, as President D'Escoto Brockmann stressed in his introductory statement.

For more than 20 days now, the people of Gaza have been living in a hell on Earth. Gaza is ablaze, and every day ordinary people are dying under the bombs. Gaza is being crushed before the eyes of the entire world, and the principles and resolutions of the United Nations — which should provide a shelter from this onslaught by fire and steel — have remained dead letter. Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), adopted over a week ago, has yet to be implemented and has in no way helped the people of Gaza, who have sought to flee but can find no protection anywhere.

The President returned to the Chair.

In such circumstances — which nauseate our conscience, have elicited worldwide incomprehension and consternation, and make us fear senseless and unrestrained reactions elsewhere in the world — Cape Verde, like other Member States, demands an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire and an end to all hostilities and military offensives so that the international community can effectively and swiftly address the growing humanitarian crisis that has festered too long in that territory and allow the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians sorely in need.

Gazans find themselves trapped without food, shelter, assistance or recourse. We must put an end to the blockade of the territory and ensure that the parties recognize the urgent need to respect international humanitarian law, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We must save lives, but we must also safeguard the future.

It is absolutely vital to the Palestinian population in Gaza and to preserving any hope for peace in the subregion that we break the vicious cycle of violence, which, far from helping to address the root causes dividing the political entities and peoples of the region, has in fact deepened their differences and increased the uncertainty with regard to a desired lasting solution. Current events seem to be the result of a violent conjunction of the logics of hatred and force. For too long, tragic and cruel situations have arisen to fuel hatred, increase despair, undermine confidence and stifle all hope. Moreover, fear of the other and concerns about the future have allowed interests whose ideas and objectives are irreconcilable to promote regional armament, frenzied militarization and warmongering tendencies that are all the more reprehensible in that they would now seem to hinge on the policy considerations of electoral campaigns and political jockeying.

Events now unfold as if the resort to violence and the instigation of armed conflict are in themselves arguments for the acquisition of power. The murder of children trapped in the open-air prison of Gaza, the traumatization of populations and policies that are tantamount to collective punishment must lead us all, without resorting to pointless speeches and media soundbites, to continue working together to find long-term solutions that will bring peace and guarantee the survival of the Palestinian people.

We are in favour of all the ongoing efforts at mediation, particularly that of Egypt, and to end the fighting, especially that currently under way by the Secretary-General. We express the hope that all such efforts will succeed and allow us to talk once again of peace in the Middle East. We firmly believe and have always maintained that violence and the resort to arms can only further complicate the situation and cannot ever lead to sustainable peace in the region.

The current brutal and bloody attacks on the people of Gaza are compatible neither with our vision of the future of that region nor with the long-term interests of its peoples. Far from promoting the necessary convergence of attitudes, encouraging confidence-building measures or establishing the foundations for lasting cooperation to address the short- and long-term needs of neighbouring States, the new war is fuelling military ambitions, increasing the differences between communities, giving renewed strength to those moving upstream against history,

helping to mire that martyred region in a state of war, discouraging the international community's best intentions and undermining its efforts.

As the military option always leads to failure, we must work for peace. My country therefore continues strongly and resolutely to support the peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and sovereignty in an independent Palestinian State living side by side and in peace with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis of the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Annapolis joint communiqué and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

Although the exasperation expressed in this debate has often been justified, and even in the dire current circumstances, we must not forget that we have to continue to strive for dialogue, negotiation and future peace in a land that must one day see its sons and daughters working together and intermarrying, free from the burden of the past and from those differences that currently divide and torment their parents. We diplomats in particular must not compromise the future in any way.

Mr. Galvez (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): The current situation in Gaza is absolutely unsustainable and unacceptable. It has deteriorated considerably since yesterday's events, in which United Nations facilities there were bombed. Such attacks are unjustified and totally reprehensible, particularly given the fact that they occurred while the Secretary-General was visiting the region in an attempt to attain a ceasefire.

Chile profoundly regrets Israel's disproportionate use of force in the Palestinian territories and the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Chile, as ever, supports efforts to establish a lasting, stable and just peace among all parties, of course with particular emphasis on respect for the United Nations Charter, human rights, international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Only six days ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009), calling for an immediate ceasefire. Chile, for its part, calls on the parties concerned to respect the provisions of the resolution and to bring an immediate end to hostilities. The resolution is a legitimate and effective multilateral tool for ending the hostilities, reactivating the peace process, and allowing for a secure and stable regional environment.

We also call on Israel to comply forthwith with resolution S-9/1 adopted by the Human Rights Council on the grave violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly due to the recent Israeli military attacks against the occupied Gaza Strip. Chile supports the dispatch of a fact-finding mission, as called for in the resolution, to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the territory. Chile also reiterates the need to uphold the norms of international law, and of international humanitarian law in particular, and calls for the dignity and rights of innocent civilians to be respected. In that context, we call on Israel to allow immediate access for humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip.

Historically, Chile has always favoured a balanced approach, based on international law, justice and, above all, human dignity, to the conflict in the Middle East. We reiterate our position once again that the parties should begin a negotiation process leading to a dignified, comprehensive and definitive peace based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. Chile also reiterates its support for the establishment of a Palestinian State and for Israel's right to live within secure borders, as set out in various United Nations resolutions.

Chile has also contributed to a peaceful solution in the region by hosting in December a regional meeting in support of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, organized by the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Members of Israeli and Palestinian civil society participated in the meeting. Those efforts were stymied by the onset of bombing in December, which has continued to this day.

Finally, I wish to express my delegation's appreciation for and the great value it attaches to the significant work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and to the admirable dedication of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in difficult circumstances on the ground. The Government of Chile has already made a monetary contribution aimed at alleviating the humanitarian situation, channelling it through the International Committee of the Red Cross.

I wish to reaffirm my country's commitment to continuing to help address the grave crisis being experienced by the population in Gaza.

Mr. Khaleel (Maldives): At the outset, permit me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on resuming the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly to consider the urgent and dangerous situation unfolding in the Gaza Strip. We believe that that is timely and appropriate, as the escalating violence and bloodshed in Gaza have the potential for disastrous consequences not only for the region, but also for the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Maldives has been following the recent developments in Gaza and the occupied territories with grave concern. We are particularly alarmed and angered by the inhuman and shameful acts being committed by Israel against defenceless Palestinian civilians, especially women and children. The Maldives strongly and forcefully condemns the disproportionate and excessive military force being unleashed by Israel against the civilian population in Gaza, claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent Palestinians, injuring thousands more and destroying property over the past 21 days of violence.

The grave humanitarian crisis created by the closure of Gaza and by the escalation of violence and hostilities is unacceptable. The Israeli attack on the United Nations school, which killed more than 40 civilians, including several innocent children, the attack on the aid convoy of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the killing of humanitarian workers last week, as well as the shelling of the UNRWA headquarters and a hospital yesterday, reflect Israel's blatant disregard for the United Nations, human lives and international humanitarian law.

The Maldives calls upon Israel to honour its international obligations as an occupying Power and to refrain from violating the human rights of the Palestinian people. The Maldives also calls upon the international community to take urgent measures to put an end to the continuing aggression and to immediately address the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza.

In that regard, the Maldives is happy to see, for the first time in many years, the adoption of a Security Council resolution — resolution 1860 (2009) of 8 January 2009 — calling for an immediate ceasefire and putting in place a set of elements to address the humanitarian crisis. We also welcome the resolution adopted on 12 January 2009 by the Human Rights Council at its ninth special session, calling for an independent investigation into all violations of international humanitarian law by the occupying Power against the Palestinian people throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Palestinian cause has always remained close to the hearts of the Maldivian people. Our support has been unwavering and steadfast. The Maldives sincerely believes that the two-State solution — a sovereign State of Israel and a sovereign State of Palestine, coexisting side by side harmoniously within fully recognized borders — remains the only viable option to ensure long-term peace, security and stability in the region. We take this opportunity to reaffirm once again our solidarity with the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and to establish an independent and sovereign homeland on their national soil with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

There is no alternative to dialogue. A just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict can be achieved not through war and aggression, but through dialogue and negotiations based on the relevant Security Council resolutions. We therefore call upon the two parties to immediately honour and implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), to cease hostilities and to return to the negotiating table.

Before I conclude, let me take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, and to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the exemplary leadership that you both continue to demonstrate in your efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict. In addition, I should like, on behalf of my country, to thank Egypt and other States in the region for the most constructive and important role that they are playing in order to achieve a lasting and sustainable ceasefire.

The Maldives assures the Assembly of its readiness to do whatever it can to find a just and comprehensive settlement through the achievement of two States living side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders.

Mrs. Juul (Norway): The Security Council has called for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. The Foreign Minister of Norway joined all those in the Security Council who demanded an

immediate ceasefire. We now demand that Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) be fully implemented by all parties. Hamas's launching of rockets targeting civilians in Israel must stop. Israel's shelling of Gaza must stop. Israel must withdraw its troops from Gaza. We place our hope in the Egyptian initiative for an immediate ceasefire.

At the same time, the ongoing violence in Gaza has created new and urgent humanitarian needs. The Security Council entrusted the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee with alleviating the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. As Chair of the Committee, Norway stands ready to convene an international donor conference to mobilize international support for the rebuilding of Gaza. Humanitarian assistance must be channelled through existing channels, in particular the United Nations system on the ground.

International humanitarian law is crystal-clear: civilians must be protected. Norway strongly condemns Israel's shelling of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza. UNRWA is the lifeline and the safety net for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. It has continued to deliver assistance to Palestinian refugees under dangerous circumstances throughout this conflict. Norway also strongly condemns Israel's shelling of the Al-Quds Hospital of the Palestinian Red Crescent. Such attacks are completely unacceptable and contrary to international law.

We reiterate our demand for an immediate ceasefire to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza and to lay the foundations for a lasting peace.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting.

We must not let anything dampen our sense of urgency or persuade us that perhaps we should take action tomorrow or Monday. This morning, I began this meeting by saying that I felt it was absolutely urgent that we take action as early as possible this afternoon — hopefully before 6 o'clock. To that end, I once again entreat all members to be as brief as possible and to submit their full statements for distribution. In fact, with regard to the possibility that all 45 speakers remaining on my list will be able to speak, we are doing quite well.

I am receiving very good feedback. I believe that a consensus regarding the draft resolution is already clear. Some people — many, in fact — would like to strengthen it. Others would like to weaken it a bit. But I think, for this kind of thing, we have to go with the kind of proposal that I have made, knowing that it will not satisfy everyone. But at least we are complying with our duty to send a word of hope to the people of Gaza.

At the same time, I would like to share with the Assembly that I have received news of a memorandum of understanding having just been signed a couple of hours ago in Washington by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Minister for Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni. If I may be allowed to say it, we must not allow this kind of ploy to lessen our sense of urgency. That document by the parties most responsible for the tragedy being lived in Gaza has its priorities, I am sorry to say, upside down. What we need is an international guarantee that Israel will immediately comply with the unconditional ceasefire mandated by Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), that the military occupation of Gaza will end once and for all and that humanitarian assistance will be made immediately available to the thousands of victims who require it.

We shall meet again this afternoon at 3 p.m. I once again appeal for promptness. In addition, I should also like to ask that we try to shorten the oral presentation of our various statements, with the understanding that the entire text of interventions will be circulated.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.